

A Prospective View of the *Journal of Sport (and Exercise) Psychology*

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Abstract:

This article has two major purposes, to discuss the general scope and direction of the *Journal of Sport Psychology (JSP)* and to describe the basic editorial review process. During its first 7 years the journal has developed into the premier scientific publication in sport psychology. The journal will continue to emphasize theoretically based research. Various psychological approaches and research methodologies are appropriate as long as the information advances our understanding of sport and exercise behavior. The typical editorial and review processes are described for the benefit of prospective authors who may wish to become familiar with these standards and procedures before submitting manuscripts to *JSP*.

Article:

During its 7-year existence the *Journal of Sport Psychology (JSP)* has developed into an important and influential publication in the field of sport psychology. As the preceding article (Landers, Boutcher, & Wang, 1986) indicates, the publication standards and procedures of *JSP* compare favorably with those of other respected research publications in psychology and exercise science. Much of the credit for that progress is due to the editorial leadership of Daniel Landers. As of this writing I have been editor of *JSP* for approximately 8 months. The transition was greatly facilitated by the previous leadership of Dan, the efficient work of Rainer Martens and others at Human Kinetics Publishers, the contributions of the capable individuals who have served as editorial board members, reviewers, and authors, and the support of our readership. Because *JSP* has established itself as the premier sport psychology publication, I do not expect to make major changes in the basic format or editorial policies and procedures.

JSP will continue to include occasional Sport Psychology Today, Comments, and Book Review sections, as well as the Sport Psychologist's Digest of abstracts and the main body of original research articles. The section of original research articles dominates and sets the tone for the journal. *JSP* is primarily a research publication and our aim is to publish scientifically sound, high quality research that advances our understanding of human behavior in sport and exercise settings. That emphasis carries into the other sections as well. The Sport Psychology Today section presents position papers based on integrative reviews and innovative approaches. The Comments section includes short articles on methodological advances, innovative pilot or replication research, and comments or dialogue on published articles and theoretical issues. The material in these sections, like the original research articles, should advance our knowledge of sport and exercise behavior.

From the time *JSP* began publication we have adopted a broad interpretation of sport. Certainly research on psychological constructs and processes in traditional, competitive athletics falls within the scope of *JSP*. However, we also include recreational sports, physical education classes, youth sport programs, preventive and rehabilitative exercise programs, and even motor skills that we would not define as sport.

Although Landers et al. in the previous article advocated more research with elite athletes, I hold a somewhat different view. I agree that investigators interested in psychological processes and interventions in high level athletes would do well to design studies that directly assess such interventions with the elite athlete population of interest. However, I believe (admittedly my beliefs are quite biased) that far too many sport psychology researchers have directed their research at elite athletes at the expense of researchable sport psychology issues

in other sport and exercise settings. Even though few studies involve elite athletes, many articles, such as laboratory investigations of imagery processes or cognitive-behavioral interventions, often assume (implicitly or explicitly in the introduction and discussion) that the findings apply to the performance enhancement of elite athletes. Such research has merit, but we also should extend our work to sport participants who hold goals *other than* performance enhancement, such as those in exercise programs who want to improve fitness or health status or those sport participants who are more concerned with personal and social benefits than with skill performance.

Shortly after I became editor, a prospective author telephoned to ask if research on an exercise program in an institutional setting was appropriate for the journal. I hope no one will need to ask that question in the future. As the title of this article implies, I am considering and will seek advice on changing the name of the journal to the *Journal of Sport and Exercise Psychology* to more accurately reflect the scope of appropriate contexts, interests, and activities of those in the field. As much as I would like to see more articles using nontraditional settings and research questions, the content of *JSP* ultimately is determined by the content and scientific quality of the submitted manuscripts.

I encourage prospective authors to interpret a wide range of sport and exercise contexts as appropriate. Also, varied psychological perspectives and research approaches are appropriate. Personality and social psychology issues and approaches have been most popular, and more clinically oriented approaches, particularly studies of cognitive-behavioral interventions, are also common. Generally, research on subprocesses or components of behavior, such as motor control processes, are more appropriate for experimental psychology and motor behavior publications than for *JSP*. Similarly, studies of sport as a social institution or broader social issues are more appropriate for sociology and sport sociology publications. These general guidelines do *not* imply that motor control processes or social issues are forbidden. Articles that consider the relationship of the social context or underlying psychological processes to individual behavior in sport and exercise certainly are appropriate for *JSP*.

Many research methodologies and approaches are appropriate to *JSP*. Because social and personality research dominates, research approaches associated with those fields dominate, specifically laboratory and field experiments, field studies, and survey research, as documented in the Landers et al. article. However, other methodologies are welcome. With the increasing emphasis on interventions and more contributors who have training and experience in research methods appropriate to clinical and counseling fields, we are likely to see more intervention studies using such approaches as multiple baselines, reversal designs, and time series analyses with small samples. Although few sport psychologists have delved into the qualitative or interpretive approaches that are more common in such fields as anthropology and sociology, sound qualitative research may well be appropriate for some sport psychology research areas.

As a scientific publication, *JSP's* focus is *research*, and the main criteria for acceptance are scientific soundness and contribution to our understanding of human behavior in sport and exercise. Poorly designed and conducted investigations, casual observations, and weakly supported opinion statements do not contribute to our knowledge no matter how interesting or relevant the topic might seem.

Is Applied Research Appropriate?

Upon being reminded that scientific quality is *JSP's* main criterion, many sport psychologists have asked if applied sport psychology research is acceptable. The answer is Yes! In fact, most of our submitted articles could be classified as applied research. Although I have a personal fondness for basic research, I would find it difficult to argue against the claim that all sport psychology research is applied research. Basic research on psychological theories and constructs with no apparent relevance or contribution to sport and exercise behavior is not appropriate for *JSP*.

The purpose of *JSP* has always been to publish research that advances our understanding of sport and exercise behavior. That research may be basic or applied, and that distinction is quite fuzzy. Personally, I distinguish

basic and applied research by focusing on the motives of the investigators; basic researchers seem intrigued by questions whereas applied scientists are more likely to seek answers. But, basic research findings often lead to practical applications and applied research is neither a theoretical nor unscientific. Kurt Lewin noted the importance and interaction of basic and applied research some time ago:

Many psychologists working today in an applied field are keenly aware of the need for close cooperation between theoretical and applied psychology. This can be accomplished in psychology, as it has been accomplished in physics, if the theorists do not look toward applied problems with highbrow aversion or with a fear of social problems, and if the applied psychologist realizes that there is nothing so practical as a good theory. (Lewin, 1951, p. 169)

Most current psychologists, including those in clinical and applied areas, continue to recognize the role of theoretical research by emphasizing the scientist-practitioner model. Ron Smith, President-elect of the Association for the Advancement of Applied Sport Psychology (AAASP) and a clinical psychologist, stressed this point in an AAASP newsletter article:

We must be certain that in the years to come, research and theory development keeps pace with application. Application research can be the crucible in which we test models and develop increasingly more effective interventions. I believe that our field will be best served by a scientist-practitioner model which compels us to systematically evaluate what we are doing in the arena of application. (Smith, 1986, p. 3)

Forsyth and Strong (1986) recently made a good case for both basic and applied research in a highly applied field in their article on the scientific study of counseling and psychotherapy. Their central propositions state that psychotherapy research is science, that it is part of the overall study of human behavior, and that varied scientific approaches are appropriate. All those propositions apply equally well to applied sport psychology. Forsyth and Strong emphasize that basic and applied science are more alike than different. Specifically they argue that both are science rather than technology; both accept the long-term goal of increasing knowledge and understanding; both involve relating observations back to theoretical constructs that provide a framework for interpreting data and generating predictions; both insist that the test of theory lies in objective, empirical methods rather than logical claims or subjective feelings; and both involve a striving for consensus among members of the discipline concerning acceptable, unacceptable, and to-be-evaluated explanations of empirical observations. Professional issues may stimulate research questions, but applied concerns must be placed into a theoretical context and evaluated with sound, scientific methods.

Those same guidelines apply to *JSP* articles. Theoretically based research, using sound empirical methods, that contributes to our understanding of sport and exercise behavior is sought, regardless of the specific research approach or psychological content. Research on intervention strategies and other applied issues must be conducted with as much planning and scientific rigor as is research on more basic sport psychology issues.

Many of those who claim that *JSP* should be more open to applied research have something else in mind. Most of the "applied" papers rejected for *JSP* are either weak research or not research at all. Forsyth and Strong note that problem-solving activities within a specific situation are more akin to technology or social engineering than to science. Similarly, much of what some sport psychologists wish to call applied research is problem-solving within a specific program. Such work is commendable; evaluation is a critical component of sport psychology practice. Observations, insights, and ongoing evaluations within applied programs may suggest research questions. But, such specific, limited activities do not generalize and contribute to sport psychology knowledge, and they are not science.

Sport psychologists who are working with sport participants owe primary responsibility to those individuals. Practicing psychologists do not try to turn every clinical case or counseling program into a research article, and sport psychologists should not do so either. Sport psychologists who try to mix their research and practice in one setting likely will do a disservice to both, and may tread dangerously close to unethical practices.

Sport psychologists who have been hoping for an outlet for educational and clinical sport psychology work that does not fit *JSP's* research emphasis now have a place to turn. A new journal, *The Sport Psychologist*, is now accepting submissions and will publish its first issue in March, 1987. Like *JSP*, *The Sport Psychologist* will be published by Human Kinetics, and sport psychologists with interests in both research and professional practice should find the two journals to be complementary sources of sport psychology information.

Characteristics of Good Research Articles

So, *JSP* focuses on research that contributes to our understanding of sport and exercise behavior. As noted earlier, many research strategies are possible, and I hope that *JSP* will include a variety of research approaches that offer differing strengths and weaknesses and provide an overall mix that will yield a richer and deeper knowledge base. Having said this, I must point out that submitted articles are subjected to stringent review procedures and we hold certain goals and standards in that process.

The best research articles contribute to theory development. Many sport psychologists misinterpret Martens' (1979) provocative "smocks and jocks" article, which advocated greater relevance to sport and more multivariate, longterm field research; they see it as an excuse to ignore theory. Actually, Martens explicitly called for more attention to theory building as the first way for sport psychology to become a more relevant science. Martens cautioned against simply testing specific hypotheses derived from psychology theories of questionable relevance, but he clearly advocated research that advances sport psychology theory. His call for less emphasis on laboratory research (*not* its abandonment) was not a plea for less emphasis on theory, but a call for a wider range of research approaches and settings to further the development of relevant, valid sport psychology theory.

Ideally, all research published in *JSP* contributes to theory development. In practice a disappointingly small number of articles address significant conceptual issues and answer theoretical questions. In the preceding article Landers et al. note the small number of theory-based articles submitted to *JSP*, and Landers (1983) more explicitly called for research strategies that advance our theories and conceptual models in his appropriately titled article, "Whatever Happened to Theory Testing in Sport Psychology?" Many authors cite theoretical work, but few explicitly test theoretical predictions. Moreover, very few studies follow the most desirable approach of testing alternative predictions. Instead, most submissions, if they have any theoretical base, are designed to confirm a particular prediction. As a result, findings that fail to confirm the prediction usually are practically as well as statistically nonsignificant.

Lest I sound overly pessimistic, let me provide a more positive example. One of the few sport psychology investigations that tested alternative theoretical predictions is Feltz's (1982; Feltz & Mugno, 1983) work on Bandura's self-efficacy theory. Feltz compared Bandura's theory, which proposes that self-efficacy is the critical mediator between various interventions or coping strategies and behavior change, with an anxiety-based model, which considers self-efficacy a consequence of anxiety reduction and not at all a necessary mediator. Feltz found that self-efficacy did influence performance and play a mediating role, thus disconfirming the anxiety-based model. However, Feltz also reported that Bandura's theory did not explain all observed relationships, and she proposed modifications in Bandura's theory to more accurately explain sport behavior. Feltz, then, not only contrasted alternative theoretical models but also used her findings from a sport context to contribute to theory development as advocated by Martens.

Those familiar with Feltz's work know that her study involved several variables in a complex, multivariate path analysis design. As Martens, Landers, and others have pointed out, human behavior in sport and exercise is complex and multivariately determined. I agree that multivariate approaches are appropriate and desirable for the investigation of sport and exercise behavior, which certainly has multivariate determinants and consequences. However, I caution researchers and authors to make sure that every variable and measure in their study has a purpose and potential tie to a conceptual framework. Adding variables and performing more complex analyses does not necessarily provide more answers. Instead, adding variables without a theoretical basis usually increases confusion and may hide or de-emphasize potentially important, simpler findings. Investi-

gators who use complex designs and analyses should be prepared to interpret the complex interactions and relationships that might emerge. Complex multivariate multiple regression designs and path analyses with LISREL do not derive theoretical relationships. Indeed, the proper use of path analysis requires a preexisting theoretical model. Unfortunately, from an editor's perspective, far too many manuscripts reflect a failure to consider theoretical questions before collecting data (usually lots of data) and performing all possible analyses.

Just as researchers should use appropriate but not overly complex designs and analyses, authors should communicate their research in clear and simple language. Too often authors write as though they believe obfuscation of ideas and findings indicates scholarship. Neither editors, reviewers, nor readers hold this view. Editors and reviewers become irritated trying to sort through excessive verbiage in a quest for the research question or results. Readers are less inclined to make this extra effort, and our articles should be written to communicate to our readers.

In an American Psychological Association report, Scan (1983) described the "perfect manuscript" from an editor's perspective as one that reports research that is worth doing, that will make a contribution if well conducted and well reported. She specifically listed the criteria for "worthy" research as, (a) asks questions of clear interest to the field, (b) states questions clearly in testable form, (c) uses appropriate, reliable, valid methods, (d) achieves results that illuminate the questions asked, and (e) has sampled across subjects, methods, and measures so that the results can be generalized beyond the local interests of the author and the author's locale (Scarr, 1983, p. 6). Scarr further noted that the perfect manuscript is well organized and written in English rather than pseudoscientific jargon so that it coherently and clearly communicates the author's understanding of the research to the reader.

As editor of *JSP*, I look for similar perfect manuscripts. The best manuscripts pose important questions about sport and exercise behavior, report research that answers those questions within a theoretical framework using appropriate methods and analyses, and communicate the findings in a clear and organized manner.

Editorial Review Procedures

This section describes the standards and procedures involved in the editorial review process. This information is provided especially for those prospective authors who have the "perfect manuscript" and want to know about *JSP's* review process, but even experienced *JSP* authors may find some new information.

Editorial Structure

Prospective authors, reviewers, and anyone who has questions about the content and format of *JSP* should direct their inquiries to the editor. As discussed in the preceding article (Landers et al., 1986), Dan Landers was one of the founders of *JSP* and served as editor during the journal's first 7 years. When Dan decided to leave his editorial position the publisher (Rainer Martens of Human Kinetics), after consultation with editorial board members, appointed me to serve as editor for a 3-year term with a possible 2-year extension. At the end of my term a new editor will be appointed following similar procedures. Most likely the new editor will be someone who has served on the editorial board and is familiar with *JSP's* editorial process as well as with sport psychology research in general. As editor, I appoint editorial board members, reviewers, and digest compilers, deal with all submitted manuscripts and other correspondence about *JSP*, make final decisions on the content of *JSP*, and send each complete issue to Human Kinetics for publication.

Although I am the only person that most authors correspond with, several other individuals play critical roles in the editorial review process. Specifically, editorial board members and guest reviewers evaluate submitted manuscripts and I rely on those evaluations when making editorial decisions.

Editorial board members are appointed by the editor for a 2-year term, although many are reappointed for several terms. Board members typically are experienced authors and reviewers who are selected because of their knowledge of the general sport psychology field and expertise in specific subareas that represent the diverse

approaches within the field. Appointment to the board is not honorary, but a working appointment. Board members are expected to provide timely and thoughtful reviews of 6 to 10 manuscripts per year.

Our 22 editorial board members cannot possibly review all submitted manuscripts, so I also maintain a list of guest reviewers that changes continually. Most guest reviewers are competent sport psychologists who have published in *JSP* or publications of similar quality. Some guest reviewers are not sport psychologists but they have expertise in specific topics (e.g., social psychologists who work on self-efficacy, counseling psychologists who conduct intervention programs, sport sociologists or motor control specialists who can evaluate interdisciplinary work). Both guest reviewers and board members are expected to evaluate manuscripts, maintain confidentiality, and provide comments in a professional manner to help authors understand the editorial decision and improve their research.

In addition to the board members and guest reviewers who deal with submitted manuscripts, several other individuals contribute to the journal. Several individuals, both in the United States and in other countries, are appointed to serve 2-year terms as digest compilers. These individuals review selected publications and submit abstracts of published articles on sport psychology topics that are published in our Sport Psychologist's Digest section. Penny McCullagh has served capably as our book review editor for several years; she assigns sport psychology books to reviewers and submits completed reviews to the editorial office. My editorial assistant, David Dzewaltowski, helps with the daily operation and record keeping for *JSP*. Finally, after we have completed our editorial work, each issue is sent to Human Kinetics Publishers where managing editor Peg Goyette takes charge of the actual publication.

Manuscript Review Process

Now that I have described the structure and personnel involved in *JSP*, I will describe the typical steps and procedures followed with submitted manuscripts. First, before sending anything, authors should make sure they have followed the guidelines to contributors, which are published in every issue of *JSP*. Specifically, manuscripts should be in APA format (third edition, 1983) and prepared for blind review. Recently we changed the guidelines to request *four* copies of submitted manuscripts to facilitate our reviews. Thus, authors should check a recent issue of *JSP* to be certain they are adhering to the most recent guidelines before submitting a manuscript to the editorial office. Checking the guidelines will also help authors find the correct editorial address. Most authors are now sending manuscripts to me, but some are still sending them to the former editor, Dan Landers, delaying the review process. I will be complicating things more by moving to Greensboro, North Carolina, in December; of course the editorial office will move with me. Those authors who keep up with the editorial office moves will be rewarded with slightly faster turnaround times.

When I receive a manuscript, I read it to make sure the content is appropriate and the format is correct. A very few manuscripts are returned to the author immediately without review. For the vast majority of submissions, we send an acknowledgement card, tear off identifying title pages and footnotes (if the author failed to follow blind review procedures), and send the manuscript to two reviewers, usually one board member and one guest reviewer. After receiving the reviewers' evaluations, I make a decision on the manuscript's acceptability and send the decision and reviewers' comments to the author. We try to provide feedback within 8 to 10 weeks, but delays are more common than we all would like. Manuscripts or reviews may be delayed in the mail, especially if an author or reviewer is not in the United States; occasionally I cannot deal with a new submission in the usual 2 or 3 days; sometimes a reviewer will not be able to review a manuscript and will return it; and sometimes reviewers are away and the manuscript remains on someone's desk for an extended time. I try to decide on manuscripts within a week after receiving both reviews, but if the two reviews differ markedly I may seek a third review, which extends the process. Also, when reviewers make extensive comments and express considerable uncertainty about a manuscript, I take more time to consider the comments and make a decision.

After considering the reviewers' comments and my own evaluation, I classify the manuscript as (a) acceptable or acceptable pending minor revisions, (b) unacceptable in present form, but with an invitation to revise and

resubmit, or (c) rejection. To the dismay of many authors, especially those who feel parental toward their manuscripts (which includes most of us), option "a" is rare and option "c" is by far the most common. As Landers et al. (1986) related, 75% to 80% of submitted manuscripts are rejected. The review process is not perfect, but neither is it designed with malicious intent. In our quest to publish the very best research and to advance sport psychology knowledge we may reject some promising work or slight an author's favorite topic. Even the most published researchers in our field have received rejection letters. Most cope by finding other suitable publication outlets or by using the feedback to improve their research. Reviewers' comments are not personal criticisms and we all attempt to make constructive comments that will help authors in their future research and writing. To the best of my knowledge, neither Dan Landers nor I have ever accepted a submitted manuscript without requesting revision. Thus, a decision that a manuscript is unacceptable in its present form is a relatively favorable judgment. The invitation to revise provides an opportunity to correct problems and address issues or concerns raised by knowledgeable colleagues before the work is set in print.

The outlook for revised and resubmitted manuscripts is far more promising than the outlook for initial submissions. Generally, if an author makes requested changes, presents a reasonable justification for not making selected requested changes (e.g., two reviewers requested contradictory changes or a reviewer misinterpreted statements), and satisfactorily addresses issues raised by the reviewers, the revised manuscript likely will be accepted or accepted pending minor revisions. However, if the author reacts defensively and refuses to make changes or to consider the issues raised by reviewers, the revision likely will be rejected and returned *without* an invitation to resubmit.

Once a revised manuscript is accepted, I will put it on the publication schedule and send it to Human Kinetics with the next issue. At this time we do not have a publication lag and accepted articles usually are published in the next issue of *JSP*, within 6 months. Considering all the steps—submission, the initial processing and review, author's revision time and resubmission, final review and acceptance, actual publication—most accepted articles are published about one year after the time of the first submission. This total time compares favorably with other research publications in psychology and sport and exercise science.

In sum, I encourage authors who have conducted sound, theory-based research that contributes to our understanding of sport and exercise behavior to submit their work to *JSP*. We will do our best to deal with the manuscript in an equally efficient and professional manner.

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